

BOOK REVIEW. *Trees of Tropical Asia. An Illustrated Guide to Diversity.* James V. LaFrankie, Jr. 2010.

Philippines: Black Tree Publishing, Inc. 22.9 cm × 15.5 cm, card cover. 750 p. ISBN 978–971–94794–0–6. Price SGD 125 / US\$ 149.

The author has 20 years of field experience in several countries of SE Asia, including a considerable time in the company of the legendary Malaysian botanist K.M. Kochummen. This collaboration must have been very profitable for the author, which probably explains why Kochummen is the only person consistently referred to as “Mr.”.

SE Asia is defined as the tropical area from Burma to Borneo and the Philippines. The flora in this part of the world is so rich that a choice has to be made: 157 families and 887 genera are treated, with notes on description, ecology and possible confusion. Numerous illustrations, mostly of good quality, help to give an idea of the taxa discussed. Some genera not occurring in “SE Asia” are also included, such as *Schumacheria*, a Sri Lankan endemic; *Eriandra*, a Papuan endemic; *Galbulimima*; *Pigafetta* and *Macadamia*, extending west to Sulawesi.

Although the book deals principally with trees, also lianas, shrubs and even some herbs are mentioned, giving the reader more than promised. On the other hand I wonder why some prominent woody taxa such as *Dracaena* and the omnipresent Bambusoideae are left out.

The book is said to be aimed at beginning students, young staff of local herbaria and overseas botanists who want to know more about Asian plants. To this aim the author has condensed a large amount of information by using a very small lettertype and leaving out author names. In the introductory chapters the author explains that modern molecular and cladistic research has led to changes in traditional systematic concepts. Although the new phylogeny often confirms some “suspicions” based on morphological grounds, more often than not the conclusions can be quite baffling. Who would suspect that *Rafflesia* is closer to Euphorbiaceae *s.s.* than *Daphniphyllum* or *Dichapetalum*? On the other hand, the author allows morphological evidence to prevail in the case of *Bischofia*. This genus belongs to the Phyllanthaceae (split off from Euphorbiaceae) on molecular grounds, but is placed in a separate family because it is morphologically aberrant.

The author urges his readers to look at trees as living populations and not as dried specimens in the herbarium. He also warns that DNA-based information, albeit necessary and sensible, should not lead to the assumption that inventory and enumerations are in the eclipse. I would like to add that young botanists are perhaps best advised to learn to recognise genera rather than families. The last word in modern family phylogeny is far from being said. Generic concepts seem to be less prone to changes.

An extensive list of references is given in which, to my surprise, many prolific authors of the Flora Malesiana series (Ding Hou, Leenhouts, Sleumer) are not mentioned. Indices to scientific names are added as well as to Malay, Thai and Vietnamese names, but not to Indonesian names. The few Indonesian names in the text are often wrong. My main point of criticism is the number of spelling and printing errors.

All the same, I want to compliment Dr. LaFrankie for bringing together a vast amount of information on one of the most diverse floras of the world. It is the first work of its kind.

Max van Balgooy

Nationaal Herbarium Nederland